

HOLMES – BIDDLE GRANTS

HARRISON LORING

Among those who later occupied the Holmes-Biddle 1627 land grant was Duxbury's Harrison Loring, a brother of Samuel Loring. Harrison had been building ships in the mid-1800s. In 1857 he was also involved in building steam engines at his City Point Works in South Boston. At that time, four years before the Civil War, he started building ironclad ships. Many shipyards continued building sailing vessels, failing to see that the "golden age of sail" was about to end.

By 1862 Loring was one of only two Boston shipyards building steam engines and iron-plated ships. The first naval battle between ironclad ships occurred on March 8 and 9 of that year between the U.S.S. Monitor and the Merrimac (C.S.S. Virginia). At Hampton Roads, Virginia on March 8 the Merrimac engaged the Union's blockading ships, sinking two and damaging several others. The next day the U.S.S. Monitor arrived and the two ironclads slugged it out with neither gaining significant victory.

Harrison Loring's City Point Works built several ships for the U.S. Navy. The Canonicus was the lead ship in a class of post-Monitor ironclad ships. Canonicus was the Sachem of the Narragansett Tribe. He had gained fame as a strong leader and he allied himself with Roger Williams and the settlers of Rhode Island. The Narragansett Tribe was destroyed in the Great Swamp Fight (1675) near the end of the King Philip's War. Canonicus did not live to see his nation's bitter end. George H.W. and George W. Bush are believed to be descendants of Canonicus. Building the U.S.S. Canonicus may have been Harrison's undoing. The ship's construction was delayed by changes in the armor, turrets, hull and even the position of the turret to balance the ship's trim. A legal battle arose over charges that ultimately amounted to \$170,000. As late as the 1880's and 1890's with the suit still unsettled, City Point Works built four Lightships, three sea-going tugs and the cruiser Marblehead for the U.S. Navy. The company was taken over by three assignees, one of them being Harrison's son Harrison, Jr., to complete the government contracts for the benefit of Harrison's creditors. The plant was sold at auction in 1894 and the disputed amount was unsettled as late as 1910. Some of the above information was derived from Patrick Browne's blog Historical Digression, "Boston's First Ironclad," March 8, 2011.

Harrison Loring had the foresight to hold his property in Duxbury as a homestead. So in 1904 the large acreage at Island Creek that was his homestead was incorporated as the Bay Farm Company. The property was probably used as a dairy farm even while the family was building engines and ships in Boston. Harrison's three sons were mechanical engineers. Atherton and Robert were both graduates of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harrison, Jr. may have also been. The father and his three sons lived in Boston.

Harrison died in 1907, so it is assumed that the three sons ran the farm in absentia. And run it they did, as it became the Cadillac of the milk business in the area. They sold "certified" milk and cream for 24 cents a quart while their competitors sold a quart for 18 cents. The dairy was expensive to build and expensive to maintain. Employing about 20 men who wore white coats

and hats and were supervised daily to guard against sickness with a physician on call 24 hours a day, no dust or dirt was allowed near the milking process. The men lived in a dormitory. The cows were in a cow barn with unmatched sanitary facilities. Veterinarians checked the cows regularly for any signs of illness. The company circulated a 21-page brochure on their rigid rules for the preparation and bottling of their milk, where much of this information was obtained (courtesy of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society). The Bay Farm ran successfully until it was sold in the mid-1940's to White Brothers who ran it for another 10 years.

About the time of the sale to White Brothers, the Duxbury Playhouse bought the barn, some land and outbuildings from the Bay Farm Company. The barn was rebuilt into a theater, complete with revolving stage. In the words of Janice Neubauer, in a 2002 Duxbury Clipper article, For one brief, shining moment this community had the crme de la crme of summer theaters. Plays were produced there until as late as 1955 by the Bay Players and later with the Plymouth Rock Center for Music and Drama. The Bay Players continue on to this day. The group meets regularly and produces several shows and is always looking for actors and backstage help. They can be contacted at bayplayers.org or through the First Parish Church.

The remaining area of the Bay Farm is currently a conservation area held in three parcels by the towns of Duxbury and Kingston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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